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Before the FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION Washington, D.C. 20554

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

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In the Matter of)	The state of the
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Rulemaking to Amend Parts 1, 2, 21, and 25)	
of the Commission's Rules to Redesignate)	
the 27.5-29.5 GHz Frequency Band, to)	CC Docket No. 92-297
Reallocate the 29.5-30.0 GHz Frequency Band,)	
to Establish Rules and Policies for Local)	
Multipoint Distribution Service and for)	
Fixed Satellite Services)	

REPLY COMMENTS OF UNITED STATES TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION

I. INTRODUCTION

The United States Telephone Association ("USTA") respectfully submits these reply comments in response to the Commission's *First Report and Order and Fourth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("Fourth Notice")*. USTA is the major trade association of the local exchange carrier ("LEC") industry with over 1,000 members.

In the *Fourth Notice*, the Commission has spectrum for local multipoint distribution service ("LMDS"). The Commission envisions that "LMDS providers will offer facilities-based competition to traditional cable and telephone carriers..."²

¹ CC Docket No. 92-297, FCC 96-311, released July 22, 1996.

Fourth Notice at ¶97.

USTA's comments urged the Commission to permit open eligibility for participation in LMDS auctions.³ Most comments strongly recommended that the Commission expedite allocation of LMDS licenses for facilities-based voice and video services. In addition, unrestricted, open eligibility is supported by many commentators addressing the issue.

Commentators opposed to LEC participation in LMDS auctions (1) ignore the prior record in this proceeding, (2) reject Commission decisions in other proceedings which favored open eligibility, (3) disregard legislative history in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ("1996 Act") supporting LEC participation in LMDS, and (4) fail to present legitimate public policy or legal arguments in support of their quest to limit competition for LMDS licenses. USTA commends the Commission for its initial findings favoring open eligibility for LMDS licenses, and believes that consumers and the public treasury will benefit from the Commission moving swiftly to implement regulations to make new voice and video services a reality. The public interest demands nothing less.

II. ARGUMENTS TO RESTRICT OR BAN LEC PARTICPATION IN LMDS AUCTIONS ARE DISCRIMINATORY ANTI-COMPETITIVE AND SELF-SERVING

The commentators opposed to open eligibility can be placed into two categories: (1) small entrepreneurial companies⁴ and (2) MCI.⁵ Entrepreneurial companies argue that they

³ See Comments of USTA (August 12, 1996).

See, e.g., Initial Joint Comments of Allied Associated Partners, L.P. & GELD Information Systems (August 12, 1996); Comments of Cellularvision Technology and Telecommunications, L.P. (August 12, 1996) Comments of ComTech Associates, Inc. (August 12, 1996); Opportunities Now Enterprises (O.N.E.), Inc., (August 9, 1996); Comments of

would be unable to compete for LMDS licenses and provide facilities-based voice and video services if incumbent LECs are not restricted or excluded from LMDS auctions.⁶ Those opposed to permitting LEC participation contend that LECs would misuse their resources and market power to preempt competition in both video and telecommunications services.⁷

MCI also finds eligibility restrictions barring LECs and incumbent cable providers from bidding on licenses in their areas of service necessary because LECs and cable companies "have monopoly power, and thus have a plain economic incentive to delay or exclude entry and competition." According to MCI, LECs would warehouse LMDS licenses because "they value the spectrum more highly than others because of the 'opportunity costs' of lost monopoly profits and market share."

USTA asserts that public policy, prior FCC decisions, and the 1996 Act support open and unrestricted LEC participation in LMDS auctions. The entrepreneurs and MCI fail to raise compelling arguments to rebut the comments of LECs favoring open eligibility for LMDS

WebCel Communications, Inc. (August 12, 1996); See also, Comments of the Competition Policy Institute (August 12, 1996)(argument raised in opposition to open, unrestricted, LEC participation in LMDS are akin to those raised by the entrepreneurs and MCI and should also be rejected for the reasons stated in these reply comments).

See MCI Comments (August 12, 1996).

See, e.g., Initial Joint Comments of Allied Associated Partners, L.P. & GELD Information Systems at 3; Comments of Cellularvision Technology and Telecommunications, L.P. at 3-4; Comments of ComTech Associates, Inc. at 9; Opportunities Now Enterprises (O.N.E.), Inc., at 1; Comments of WebCel Communications, Inc. at 13.

⁷ *Id.*; See also, Comments of the Competition Policy Institute at 6-8.

⁸ See MCI Comments at 4.

⁹ *Id.* at 6.

licenses. Simply put, no entity should be favored over a competing interest. In addition, entrepreneurs may lack financial and technical resources to build LMDS in large and small communities. The Commission, however, has other options available to ensure participation by small businesses in LMDS auctions without restricting LEC participation. As stated in Joint Comments filed by Bell Atlantic and SBC, "If the Commission decides that small businesses should receive advantages in competing for LMDS spectrum, it can achieve these goals by offering bidding credits, installment payment arrangements, and other benefits. It does not need to impose rigid entry barriers in order to promote small business involvement in LMDS." USTA urges the Commission to look at the facts, dismiss the rhetoric of special interests who would impede the development of LMDS, and open LMDS auctions to all.

The argument that LECs would use their resources, coupled with LMDS licenses, to preempt competition in the telephony and video markets in their local communities ignores the reality of today's marketplace. The 1996 Act has opened every market to competition. Within the local exchange market, LECs are required to meet interconnection, unbundling and collocation requirements. Competition from cable companies like TCI and Time Warner, interexchange companies like AT&T and MCI, competitive access providers like MFS and Teleport, cellular companies, and PCS providers like Sprint Spectrum, offer vigorous

See Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 11.

See Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996, CC Docket No. 96-98, Interconnection between Local Exchange Carriers and Commercial Mobile Radio Service Providers, CC Docket No. 95-185, FCC 96-325, First Report and Order, released August 8, 1996; Second Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, released August 8, 1996.

competition. As LECs explore video programming opportunities, like open video systems, they will face competitive challenges from incumbent DBS, cable, broadcasters and other providers of video programming already in the market. Clearly, LECs have no incentive and no ability to forestall competition in the telephony or video markets with or without LMDS licenses.

III. FCC POLICY AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT SUPPORT OPEN ELIGIBILITY AND LEC PARTICIPATION IN LMDS AUCTIONS

Contrary to opposing arguments, public policy favors open eligibility for LMDS licenses. Commission Chairman Reed Hundt has stated "The goal of the Telecommunications Act is to let anyone enter any communications business -- to let any communications business compete in any market against any other." In addition, Chairman Hundt expressed the view that successful implementation of the 1996 Act required the Commission to answer the question "... are we going to succeed in writing rules that support competitive markets as opposed to favoring individual competitors?" The record in this proceeding supports open eligibility and unrestricted access to LMDS licenses on a competitive basis. As USTA and others have expressed, the Commission has consistently held that open eligibility promotes the selection of

See R. Hundt, Implementing the Telecommunications Law of 1996: The Real Work Begins, Newsweek Telecommunications Forum, Washington, D.C. (February 21, 1996).

¹³ *Id*.

See Comments of USTA at 4-5; Comments of Ameritech at 2; Comments of BellSouth at 2; Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 9-11; U.S. West, Inc. Comments at 2.

entities capable of swiftly deploying new technologies for the benefit of consumers.¹⁵ Unlike opposing commentators, USTA supports competition over regulations which are anti-competitive, discriminatory, and designed to manipulate the outcome of auctions by favoring some potential competitors over others.

USTA and others also expressed that there are no legitimate legal grounds on which the Commission should deny LECs the opportunity to bid on LMDS licenses to serve their local communities. Congress has clearly expressed its support for LECs providing LMDS. As USTA and BellSouth noted, and opposing commentators have totally ignored, Congress specifically stated that LECs can provide video programming by any means which by definition includes LMDS. If open eligibility is to have any meaning it must permit unrestricted participation by any interested entity in providing LMDS anywhere in the country. The Commission should affirm its earlier opinion in favor of open eligibility. Similarly, the Commission should not impose in-region restrictions on LECs should the Commission reject

See Comments of USTA at 9; Comments of Ameritech at 4; Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 3-6.

See, e.g., Comments of USTA at 4; Comments of Ameritech at 2-3; Comments of BellSouth at 2; Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 9-10; US West Comments at 2; Comments of Roseville Telephone Company at 3-4; Comments of Pioneer Telephone Association, Inc. at 2; Comments of PacificTelesis Group at 1; Comments of the Ad Hoc Rural Telecommunications Group at 1-3; Comments of Farmers Telephone Cooperative, Inc. at 2-3.

See Comments of USTA at 6; BellSouth Comments at 3.

See Telecommunications Act of 1996, Conference Agreement, S. Rep 104-23 at 170; Comments of USTA at 6; Comments of BellSouth at 3.

See Fourth Notice at ¶108.

efforts to impose a ban on LEC participation in the LMDS auctions. USTA supports comments opposing restrictions on service offerings by LECs in their local communities.²⁰

Some comments also suggest that LECs would bid on LMDS as a way to thwart inregion competition by "warehousing" licenses. The licensing process is the first, not the last,
step that a successful LMDS bidder must take to make a profit on providing voice and video
services to consumers. It would be foolhardy for LECs to spend large sums of money to win
LMDS licenses and not provide services as a means to restrict competition.²¹ Clearly, LECs
have every incentive to exploit LMDS licenses to their fullest economic value to maximize the
return on the investment in winning an LMDS license.²²

The Commission's suggested timetable for deploying LMDS, after the license is won, also serves as a basis for rejecting the argument that LECs would "warehouse" LMDS licenses. The Commission has proposed that LMDS licensees provide service to one-third of the population in their service area within five years and two thirds of the population within ten years.²³ Under this schedule, a licensee has no incentive to "warehouse" licenses.²⁴ With this ambitious schedule, LMDS licensees must possess the financial and technical capability to

See, e.g., Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 13-16; Comments of BellSouth at 2.

See MCI Comments at 6; Comments of WebCel at 9.

See, e.g., Comments of Roseville Telephone Company at 6, n.5; US West, Inc. Comments at 4; Comments of Pioneer Telephone Association, Inc. at 2.

²³ See 11 FCC Rcd 53, 96 at ¶117.

See Comments of the Ad Hoc Rural Telecommunications Group at 3; Comments of the National Telephone Cooperative Association at 3.

swiftly deploy LMDS. By denying or restricting LEC participation in LMDS auctions, the Commission may very well limit the development of LMDS.

USTA also cautioned in its Comments that small and rural communities may be denied the benefits of LMDS should the Commission fail to adopt an open and unrestricted auction process.²⁵ USTA supports the public interest arguments raised by a number of rural telephone companies that open eligibility will benefit the consumers that they serve, while restrictions placed on LECs would deny consumers access to new technologies.²⁶

LMDS.²⁷ The basis of this argument is that LECs would merge their existing networks in conjunction with LMDS to thwart competition.²⁸ This argument is baseless. The Commission will award licenses through an auction process. The awarding of a license to provide service is not a merger. In addition, the Commission has found it to be in the public interest to award licenses to LECs to provide other telecommunications services in their communities of service.²⁹ Those opposed to open, unrestricted, LEC participation in LMDS auctions raise bogus anti-trust concerns in an effort to eliminate those potential competitors in better financial positions to

See Comments of USTA at 6.

See Comments of the Ad Hoc Rural Telecommunications Group at 4-6; Comments of Roseville Telephone Company at 6-7; Comments of Pioneer Telephone Association, Inc. at 2-3; Comments of the National Telephone Cooperative Association at 2; Comments of Farmers Telephone Cooperative, Inc. at 2-3.

See Comments of SkyOptics, Inc. (August 12, 1996).

²⁸ *Id.* at 2-4.

See Comments of USTA at 2-3; Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 3-6,

become winning bidders. Anti-trust laws, however, are intended to protect competition not competitors. USTA maintains that there are no anti-trust issues presented in this proceeding and that the Commission should adopt an open, unrestricted, eligibility policy for the LMDS auctions.

IV. REGULATORY FORBEARANCE SHOULD BE APPLIED TO OPEN ELIGIBILITY FOR LMDS AUCTIONS

The Commission's *Fourth Notice* suggests that application of attribution and effective competition standards may benefit competition.³⁰ USTA is opposed to such eligibility and use restrictions. As USTA stated in its Comments:

The centerpiece of the 1996 Act is competition in the telecommunications and video programming markets. The Commission's objectives should mirror those contained in the 1996 Act: "... to provide for a pro-competitive, de-regulatory national policy framework designed to accelerate rapidly private sector deployment of advanced telecommunications and information technologies and services to all Americans by opening all telecommunications markets to competition"³¹

Congress has clearly stated its overwhelming preference for competition over burdensome regulations by favoring unrestricted LEC participation in LMDS. The Act also provides that the Commission should forebear from unnecessary regulations.³² Regulatory forbearance is all the more appropriate given the Commission's position of supporting

See Fourth Notice at \P 132-135.

See USTA Comments at 5-6.

³² See 47 U.S.C. §160.

unrestricted, open eligibility in licensing new spectrum.³³ USTA urges the Commission to follow the letter of the law and affirm its initial finding that no restrictions on LEC participation in LMDS is warranted.

V. CONCLUSION

The record in this proceeding, public policy, and the 1996 Act provide uncontroverted support for unbridled LEC participation in LMDS auctions. USTA's members should not be barred from deploying LMDS in their local areas by arbitrary regulations that favor potential providers of voice and video service through LMDS. Imposition of an in-region ban on LEC participation in any auction or restrictive regulations regarding LEC deployment of LMDS can only reduce the financial return to the United States Treasury, and could deprive consumers of the rapid deployment of LMDS services.

Respectfully submitted,

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August 22, 1996

See Comments of USTA at 2-3; Joint Comments of Bell Atlantic Corporation and SBC Communications, Inc. at 3-6; Comments of Ameritech at 3-4.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Gina Bechberger, do certify that on August 22, 1996 copies of the Replies of the United States Telephone Association were either hand-delivered, or deposited in the U.S. Mail, first-class, postage prepaid to the persons on the attached service list.

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